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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000956

SIPDIS

OES FOR A/S CLAUDIA MCMURRAY
AF/S FOR B. WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
CA FOR ELIZABETH GRACON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2018
TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: "QUIET DIPLOMACY" SUSPENDS ELEPHANT HUNTING IN
NATIONAL PARKS - FOR NOW

REF: HARARE 863

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) After issuing commercial hunters hundreds of questionable permits for elephant hunting in national parks, the Zimbabwean Parks and Wildlife Authority (Parks) has agreed, under pressure from photographic tour operators, to suspend the hunting. The operation, which only lasted a few weeks, appears to have failed as hunters and Parks staff killed animals larger than allowed and outside the parameters Parks set. Photographic safari operators and conservationists agree that Zimbabwe's burgeoning elephant population should be managed, but Parks' get-rich, quick-fix strategy was poorly implemented, involved professional hunting guides of questionable ethics and connections, and was ecologically unsound. While photographic safari operators believe the hunts will likely resume in some form, they hope their "quiet diplomacy" efforts will keep the issue out of the media and encourage Parks and the Zimbabwean Government (GOZ) to seek fully legal and ecologically-sound means to increase revenue and maintain Zimbabwe's wildlife.
END SUMMARY.

Overpopulation of Elephants Needs to be Managed

¶2. (C) In an August meeting with Dr. Morris Mtsambiwa, the Director of Parks, poloff asked about rumors of questionable hunting involving foreign tourists within national parks. Dr. Mtsambiwa unequivocally refuted the hunting rumors. He said that hunting within national parks is only allowed under limited circumstances: management quotas (to reduce or maintain animal populations), ration quotas (to provide Parks' staff with meat), or to kill rogue animals. In each of these cases, animals should be killed by professional hunters on Parks' staff. He told poloff that Parks did have a plan to kill about 1000 elephants in 2008 in four administrative areas: Hwange, Chizarira, Gonarezhou, and the

Zambezi valley. He termed the program an "elephant management strategy" that had been approved by the Minister of Environment, Frances Nhema. Dr. Mtsambiwa said there were five ecologically responsible means to reduce elephant populations: translocation of animals, contraception, sale within the region to conservancies or other interested parties, chasing, and culling. Zimbabwean Parks' staff conducted many successful culls in the 1980s and 1990s. Dr. Mtsambiwa said the last cull in Zimbabwe was in 1992, and that current Parks staff did not know how to do it. He told us that the 1000 elephants, including 400 in Hwange, would be killed as a training exercise for Parks staff and for population reduction.

13. (SBU) Conservationists, Parks, hunting and photographic safari operators all agree that Zimbabwe has a serious overpopulation of elephants. Parks estimates the current population is about 100,000 elephants, well above Zimbabwe's capacity of 40-50,000. This significant overpopulation has a detrimental impact on levels at watering holes and biodiversity, as elephants can cause significant damage and stress to ecosystems. Poloff spoke with numerous conservationists and former Parks officials who participated in elephant culls in the 1980s and 1990s. They described a cull as a highly resource-intensive, dangerous, and gruesome operation that is also very effective in controlling elephant populations if done properly. In a cull, an entire family unit of 10-20 elephants is surrounded on three sides by a group of armed, trained professional hunters who kill the entire group in unison. (NOTE: In Zimbabwe all professional guides and hunters must be certified after having passed

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rigorous written and field tests. END NOTE.) The entire operation happens very quickly, to prevent traumatized and scared elephants from stampeding. Professional hunters stressed the importance of having trained staff present, as each hunter must select the animal he will shoot and must kill it with one or two shots. Because the staff surrounds the elephants, there is a reasonably high risk of shooting another hunter, in addition to the risks posed by frightened elephants. Dr. Mtsambiwa repeated this description of a proper culling operation, and said that very few of his current Parks staff had this experience. He added that the current population reduction operation would provide them with that experience and training. All agreed that an important component of culling was selecting the correct animals and family units. Culling should not target large bulls, groups of adolescent males, or individuals within a family unit.

AmCit Questions Hunting Package

14. (C) Despite Mtsambiwa's assurances at our August meeting that Parks was only planning a management/training exercise for Parks staff, in early September poloff received an email from an American citizen in California, asking about an advertisement for an elephant hunt in Zimbabwe to hunt five elephants over ten days for USD 6,000 as part of a culling exercise. The meat from the animals would go to local villagers and hunters were expected to help with on-site butchering of the animals. This price is significantly less than most elephant hunting packages. Normally, elephant hunting excursions in Zimbabwe cost about USD 1,000 per day, plus a fee for each animal killed. The hunting operation was to be led by Zimbabwean Headman Sibanda and was arranged by Thomas Powers Internationale, based in Colorado.

Elephants and Ivory Pile Up

15. (C) In mid-September, Sally Bown, Administrative Officer for the Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe (SOAZ),

informed poloff that numerous photographic safari operators in Hwange National Park were sending emails reporting commercial elephant hunting incidents within the park to SOAZ, Parks, and Minister Nhema. Specifically, elephants were killed in Hwange National Park in areas frequented by tourists and near main roads within the park. (NOTE: Hwange, along the Botswana border, is Zimbabwe's largest national park and is one of the best areas in the world for elephant viewing. END NOTE.) The emails contained photos showing elephant carcasses in various states of decay, large tusks, and Parks staff vehicles escorting hunters near recently killed elephants as proof of the questionable hunting. The photographic safari operators named the professional hunters who served as commercial guides and indicated that foreign hunters, including Americans and South Africans, were killing the elephants with Parks staff assistance.

¶6. (C) Refuting Mtsambiwa's claims, the safari operators also reported that some of the hunting guides had been issued hundreds of hunting permits for elephants in Hwange and other national parks in mid-to-late August. Normally, hunting permits are offered in an auction to all professional hunting guides. In contrast, Bown said these recent permits were issued through a non-transparent process to professional hunters of ill-repute, including some South African operators. (NOTE: Under Zimbabwean regulations, all tenders should be offered to local companies first. END NOTE.) This action particularly alarmed photographic safari operators, whose businesses depend on calm animals in the national parks who are used to humans and vehicles.

¶7. (C) Meeting with poloff and conoff on October 10, Bown

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said that it was unclear "how legal" these hunting operations were, since it appeared the hunters had permits issued by Parks to kill the animals, despite the provision in the National Parks Act that prohibits commercial hunting. The photographic safari operators indicated Parks had given several local and South African hunting companies concessions to kill elephants in Hwange if they met specific criteria: (1) total ivory weight less than 30 pounds, (2) young/adolescent males, (3) isolated areas (i.e. away from watering holes and main roads), and (4) controlled by Parks staff. Parks has never publicly stated these criteria or explained the operation. Frustrated photographic safari operators weighed and photographed many of the tusks at the Park's ivory store in Hwange and found that many were over 30 pounds each. In one case, an operator claimed an American hunter killed an elephant with tusks weighing over 120 pounds. Photos also show some elephants were killed very near main roads and close to watering holes. In at least one reported case, a vehicle drove around the animal before the hunter killed it at close range. In emails to Mtsambiwa and Nhema, safari operators decried the unethical hunting both in terms of the detrimental ecological impact and the negative impact it would have on their own businesses.

Unscrupulous Hunting Guides Involved

¶8. (C) Bown, Save Valley Conservancy Director Clive Stockil and other conservationists opined in conversations with us that hunting permits were issued by Parks under intense pressure from its politicized board and ZANU-PF. Bown believed this frantic last grab at hunting revenue was one more aspect of ZANU-PF insiders' efforts to strip assets and fill their pockets before losing power to the MDC. She said that the same small group of hunters involved in this operation had been consistently involved in unethical and marginally legal hunting. Bown had no evidence that they were involved specifically with sanctioned individuals within the Mugabe regime, but believed such connections were likely. According to Bown, the Zimbabwean professional hunters involved include Guy Whitall, Tim Schultz of African Dream

Safaris, Headman Sibanda and Wayne Grant of Nyala Safaris, Evans Makanza, Alan Shearing, Buzz Charlton and James Macullam of Charlton Macullum Safaris, A.J. Van Heerden of Shashe Safaris, Barry Van Heerden of Big Game Safaris, and Lawrence Boha. (COMMENT: Numerous conservationists have suggested the Van Heerden brothers are involved in suspicious hunting and land deals with the Director of the Central Intelligence Organization, Happyton Bonyongwe, although none have provided proof of the relationship. END COMMENT.) Additionally, one safari operator accused an American, by name, of killing a lion illegally and then smuggling its hide out through South Africa. Given the rampant smuggling of other animal products across Zimbabwe's southern border (reftel), this is not unlikely. As reported in reftel, American hunting dollars are vital to Zimbabwe's conservation efforts, but there are also serious risks that Americans could be implicated in smuggling and poaching operations.

Parks Suspends, But Doesn't Explain Hunting in Hwange

¶9. (SBU) On October 9, Dr. Mtsambiwa issued a statement to SOAZ and conservationists, without admitting that illegal commercial hunting had taken place, announcing that Parks was suspending the management hunting he had told poloff in August would be the only authorized operation. The statement reiterated trophy hunting is not allowed in national parks. However, it conceded the management exercise involved both trophy and non-trophy animals, as the elephants were not selected based on size or tusks. It also stated that the tusks and hides in the current operation were not to be used for export and that the management offtake was for "training,

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staff rations, support for state and other functions, sale to crocodile farmers... Meat is also sold cheaply or given freely to communities to supplement their protein requirements." The Parks statement claims Parks had "embarked on a training exercise for its staff through engaging some experienced hunters using part of this management quota." (COMMENT: Post has neither seen nor heard of game meat distributions to communities near national parks. Further, based on the photographic evidence from Hwange, the most recent operation violates every tenet of a "proper cull" and instead bears the characteristics of commercial hunting. END COMMENT.)

"Quiet Diplomacy" Success

¶10. (C) In our October 10 meeting, Bown demurred when asked if SOAZ would consider making the hunting disputes or unscrupulous hunting more public through local or international media. She said private land conservancies and photographic safaris -- sectors that remain primarily white-owned -- had been allowed to continue because they had consistently and quietly proven their economic benefit to the GOZ. She contrasted SOAZ with the Commercial Farmers Union that represents white farmers who routinely bring their grievances to the international media, bringing shame and rebuke on Zimbabwe and the government. Bown believed that exposing these internal conflicts over elephant hunting would only serve to further reduce all tourism and increase animosity between safari operators and the GOZ, putting the businesses and wildlife at even greater risk.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Hunting has long been a source of ill-gotten revenue for members of the ZANU-PF elite, and given the ongoing resource grab, it is not surprising that new hunting schemes have developed to supply the elites with forex. SOAZ's quiet

efforts succeeded in changing Parks' policy on hunting within national parks -- for now -- and SOAZ is gathering proposals to present to Parks for means to increase revenue and manage the elephant population through ecologically and tourist-friendly means. This ongoing struggle over greed, ill-gotten forex, and natural resource management is just one more result of the continued political impasse in Zimbabwe.
END COMMENT.

MCGEE